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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001419

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA'S RECALL SCRUM: DEMO-CRAZY IN ACTION

REF: LA PAZ 1411

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On June 23 opposition prefects rejected the recall referenda scheduled for August 10 and challenged President Evo Morales to call new elections for the prefects and the president in which incumbents would not run. The central government responded by describing the opposition prefects as "coup plotters." Civic groups and the national opposition issued statements against the prefects, while the head of the private business confederation and the La Paz prefect came out in support of them. End summary.

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Opposition Prefects Throw Down Gauntlet
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¶2. (SBU) After a day-long meeting on June 23, the National Democratic Council (CONALDE)--composed of opposition prefects and civic leaders from Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, and Cochabamba--announced that they would not recognize the recall-referenda law nor participate in the recall referenda because they do not fit with the autonomy statutes. Instead, they challenged President Evo Morales to convoke general elections. Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas (ironically the prefect most likely to survive a recall referendum) announced that neither the prefects nor Evo should run in the proposed election. Beni Prefect Ernesto Suarez explained: "If we are the people who are causing the problem, we should step aside." Costas called the recall referenda law "unconstitutional" and explained that the autonomous regions now have "their own mechanism of mandate revocation that we cannot ignore."

¶3. (SBU) CONALDE stated that it would support the participation of other Bolivian regions in the autonomy process, starting with the upcoming election of the prefect of Chuquisaca. CONALDE's letter to the central government invites Evo to meet with the opposition on July 1 and includes an agenda that demands government recognition of the autonomy referenda and devolution of gas royalties to the departments. CONALDE also accused the government of "state terrorism," referring to the palace guard who confessed to

dynamiting an opposition television station (reftel.)

GOB Denounces Prefects

¶4. (SBU) In response, the central government accused CONALDE members of being "coup plotters." Presidency Minister Juan Ramon Quintana announced publicly, "This plan of the prefects is a coup against Congress. Therefore it should be Congress that initiates, as quickly as possible, a suit against those prefects." Calling on all authorities to oppose CONALDE's decision, Quintana added, "The resistance, the disrespect, the transgression against constitutional order, against the Constitution, that the prefects are calling for today is nothing more than a coup against the Constitution and democracy."

National Opposition: With friends like these...

¶5. (C) The Senate's leader of the opposition party PODEMOS, Senator Roger Pinto, reminded the public that the recall referendum is based in law. (Comment: Some observers viewed the national opposition's unexpected approval of Evo's recall law--widely seen as disadvantageous to the prefects--as a blow against the regional opposition, which has gained prominence as the national opposition has lost influence. End comment.) Pinto issued a public statement: "The prefects' vision is very local, regional. We, the Congress, believe that the solution is not in autonomy. We believe that there is a (recall) law and if CONALDE believes that (avoiding recall referenda) is the right path, let them propose a law to Congress: one law eliminates another." Congressman Arturo Murillo from the center-right opposition party National Unity warned that the opposition prefects should not behave as the government has: "We complained when the president opposed the (autonomy) vote and doing the same (opposing the recall referenda) would be a mistake that would not only have legal consequences, but could result in massive confrontations."

Schoolyard Scuffles and Finger Pointing

¶6. (SBU) Obeying Evo's earlier declaration that the government will use "social pressure" to ensure that the recall referenda take place, cocalero-leader Julio Salazar announced that "rejecting the recall law is equivalent to breaking the law and defying the constitution. They (the opposition) challenged the president to go to the recall vote and now they don't want it; it's a crime and they should be judged and processed. What they have decided is to destabilize democracy and the people, and we're not going to allow that. They are making us prepare ourselves: if they do not accept the referendum willingly, we will force them to."

¶7. (SBU) Gabriel Dabdoub, president of the Bolivian Business Confederation, supported the prefects' decision: "The recall referendum is, on the one hand, unconstitutional, and on the other hand, was pushed by minorities...Beyond that, we believe that the economy is facing a firing squad. The president and prefects should comply with their mandates but govern for the country, for the people." La Paz Prefect Jose Luis Paredes (predicted not to survive a recall referendum) came out in favor of the CONALDE decision and also cast blame on the central government for gutting the Constitutional Tribunal: "The recall is worthless...but the deciding factor will be the government, which must make its decision through the national electoral court or Congress. If there were constitutional control (a functioning Constitutional Tribunal) neither the recall law nor the autonomy statutes would be valid."

Comment

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18. (C) In challenging the president to a new election, the prefects have complicated the already-confused democratic process in Bolivia. The prefects' suggestion that neither they nor Evo place themselves up for re-election is a surprise, but probably a safe gambit. If Evo agrees, the opposition will have decapitated the MAS idol, leaving only its feet of clay. If, as expected, Evo refuses to stand down, the opposition prefects can also run, while claiming the high road for their attempt at peacemaking. Since no dialogue between the president and the prefects is probable--despite the prefects' invitation for July 1--the two sides will likely continue in their separate trajectories, insulting each other and preparing for eventual confrontation. La Paz Prefect Paredes' observation regarding the lack of constitutional oversight is correct: with no Constitutional Tribunal to decide what acts are constitutional, both the opposition prefects and Evo can claim legitimacy. Without a refereeing body, it is quite conceivable that there could be a recall vote on August 10 that takes place only in the departments that Evo's MAS party controls, i.e. the Altiplano. Evo would then claim he has popular support--he recently told reporters off-the-record that he would get 56 percent approval--while the opposition prefects would remain in place. In other words, nothing would change except for an even more polarized Bolivia. End comment.

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